DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 119 305 EA 007 936

AUTHOR Tyler, Ralph W.
TITLE The American Schools Can Meet the New Demands They Are Facing.
PUB DATE 22 Feb 76
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association of School Administrators (108th, Atlantic City, New Jersey, February 20-23, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Activity Learning; *Education; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethical Values; *Individual Development; Social Factors; *Social Influences

ABSTRACT

The nation's schools face difficult problems that must be solved if they are to continue serving our society constructively and effectively. The two hundred years of our country's history demonstrate that in the past the schools have met new needs and have responded well to growing demands for education. An examination of several of the problems schools are now encountering finds bases for confidence regarding the future. The experience with Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act demonstrates that schools can, albeit slowly, devise new programs and new ways of working with disadvantaged children. A number of high schools have already worked out with various persons and agencies in their communities ways by which youth can work constructively with adults to render service, to obtain firsthand experience with the wider world, and to gain assurance that they are becoming responsible adults. (Author/IRT)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS
108th Annual Convention
Atlantic City, N.J. February 20-23, 1976

ED119305

SPEAKER: Ralph W. Tyler, Director Emeritus, Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences, Chicago, IL

TOPIC: The American Schools Can Meet the New Demands They Are Facing

PLACE: Room H-J, Convention Hall

TIME: 1:00 P.M., Sunday, February 22

PROGRAM: Page 64

Summary of Remarks

Introduction

Disillusionment and cynicism characterize much of the current treatment of the contributions made by our public schools. Why? Partly, it is a reaction from the over-optimistic expectations of the 50's and 60's. A similar mood followed the affluent period of the 20's. Partly, it is a misinterpretation of the published and publicized reports of James S. Coleman and Christopher Jencks. These reports are often interpreted as stating that the schools have no effect on the learning of their students, whereas, they actually reported that the relative achievement of students was more largely predictable from family background than from other factors, that is, children with educated parents learned more in school than children whose parents had little education.

Partly, the current pessimism is due to a lack of understanding of the impact of societal changes of the schools.

Background

The American schools have been amazingly successful in meeting new demands as our nation developed during the 200 years since its founding. We have produced a literate society from communities of frontiersmen and peasants. We have assimilated millions of newcomers from a variety of nations without destroying our own society. Social mobility is far higher than in any other country, and much of it has been attained through education. We have a flexible labor force, able to respond to the requirements of modern science and technology. In most of the nation's classrooms, children are treated humanely and with respect. The schools have contributed to the socialization of its students and they have also aided many to develop their own unique talents and to pursue their individual interests. Although these achievements have not been universally attained, they are being reached by an increasing proportion of our children and youth. These are no small accomplishments, and they have been made possible because of the intelligent efforts of educators and laymen to meet new problems in new ways without being severely handicapped by the restraining hand of outworn traditions.

more

EA 007 936

These copies were made on an A. B. Dick 1600 copy printer

Continued Demand for Schooling

A heavy demand for schooling exists in all modern industrial states. From the viewpoint of both the individual and society, pressures for more education will continue to be felt from all sectors of our nation into the indefinite future. These pressures can largely be attributed to the high demand for educated people in a modern industrial democracy and to the aspirations of a great majority of persons for education for themselves and for their children.

The most obvious evidence of the demand in modern society for educated people is the rapid shift in the compositon of the U. S. labor force. As material production is increasingly carried on with machines and other technological devices, many persons are freed from routine labor to meet the demands for services. Non-farm unskilled labor now comprises less than 5% of the labor force; all farm (agricultural) labor, most of which is now skilled labor, is down to only 5%. Increases in employment have been largely in fields requiring a considerable degree of education -- in the health services, educational services, recreational services, social services, science, engineering, accounting and administration. As to aspirations, public opinion polls show that over 90% of the adults in the U. S. believe that education is a good thing and want it for their children. Furthermore, they believe it is possible for them to obtain more education. It seems clear that the pressures for education are high and are likely to continue into the future. What has changed is not so much the school as other parts of the educational system.

The Educational System

The educational system that furnishes the experiences through which young people learn the things required to participate constructively in our modern, industrialized society includes much more than the school. What he experiences in the home, in his social activities in the community, in the chores and jobs he carries on, in the religious institutions where he participates, in his reading, in his listening to radio and viewing of TV, and in the school, all are included in the actual educational system through which he acquires his knowledge and ideas, his skills and habits, his attitudes and interests, and his basic values. The school is an important part of this educational system in furnishing the opportunity to learn to read, write and compute, and to discover and use the sources of facts, principles and ideas that are more accurate, balanced and comprehensive than are provided in most homes, work places or other social institutions. The school also supplements and complements learning furnished by the other institutions, and is usually an environment which more nearly represents the American social ideals than the larger society. In most schools, each student is respected as a human being without discrimination, the transactions in the classroom are guided an attempt to be fair and dispense justice, and the class morale is a reflection of the fact that the members care about the welfare of others.

In the past, experiences in the home, the work situation, and the school have made somewhat different contributions to the development of American youth. Most young people have acquired their basic habits of orderliness, punctuality, and attention to work primarily through experiences in the home and in work settings, with helpful supplementation of the school's regimen. The meaning and importance of productive work

more

were developed through participation in family chores, and in the part-time jobs in which they commonly worked under close supervision, with critical appraisals made of their efforts; for example, mowing lawns, shoveling snow, preparing meals, doing laundry, carrying newspapers, and working in stores and shops. Productivity in working on school assignments does not impress young people as having the same social importance as productivity in doing chores and working on other jobs. Developing an interest in productivity and the desire to be productive, are important in the education of youth for constructive work roles but they have not been chiefly acquired through school experiences.

Learning to take responsibility for a task and accepting the consequences of success and failure in performing it is another important aspect of education for adult work roles not primarily learned in school. Responsibility for doing one's school assignments does not have the same meaning for a young person as being responsible for work directly affecting others, the consequences of which will be judged by others. Adolescents commonly vacillate between the desire to take large responsibilities and the fear of failure. Hence, learning to take responsibility and to bear the consequences requires considerable experience, with gradual increase in the degree of responsibility and in the seriousness of the consequences of failure, paralleling the increase in the competence and confidence of the youth. The school alone can contribute only a minor range of learning experiences for this purpose. Situations which are clearly real and adult-like as perceived by young people are necessary. This means that the opportunities must be furnished in business, industry, agriculture, health agencies, civil service, social agencies, and the like: the institutions in the community where adults take responsibility and where real consequences follow. The school can help to find these opportunities for youth, can help to organize them for effective and sequential learning and to supervise them to assure that educational values are being attained, but the school alone has very limited capabilities for educating youth in this important area.

The traditional role of the school in teaching academic skills and knowledge has not commonly included the development of realistic knowledge of the "modern world of work" in terms of the functions of various kinds of economic institutions, the roles of different persons who work in them the ways in which an individual can find employment in different kinds of settings, etc. This lack has been noted by a number of groups and individuals over the past half-century but there has not yet been widespread adoption of this responsibility by the school, accompanied by an educational program likely to achieve the desired goal.

The school can also contribute to the development of social skills that are essential to effective work in service occupations and in group settings in all vocations. Schools are societies in microcosm where children and youth communicate, cooperate and compete, and generally carry on their transactions without serious conflict or the arousal of intense antagonism. Opinion polls of youth report that they are generally well satisfied with the social environment of their schools. Most schools appear to contribute positively to the development of the kind of social skills essential to many kinds of work situations.

more

In educational systems of the past, the several parts have certain interdependent features. The student's interest in learning what the school sought to teach was usually stimulated in other parts of the system, in the home, in the working place, and in the social life of the community so that the school did not need to develop particular motivation for learning on the part of the majority of students. Furthermore, as skills in reading, writing and arithmetic were developed in the school, the student found many opportunities for their use in his activities outside the school, particularly in work and in recreation. Skillsquickly become inoperative when their use is infrequent. If the only reading required of youth is that assigned in school, reading skills do not reach a mature level. If writing is limited to an occasional note or letter, writing skills remain very primitive. If arithmetic is not used in such home activities as consumer buying, furniture construction, and budgeting, or in outside work, arithmetic skills and problem-solving are likely to be haphazard. Hence, the total educational system needs to be viewed as one in which practice as well as initial learning is provided.

The main point to be made prior to considering changes in policies and practices is that the educational system is more than the school system. In the recent period of rapid social change, the educational roles of the home, the community, the religious institutions, and employment have been greatly changed. Generally, they have been reduced. Only the school is maintaining approximately the same role with the same amount of time annually for its work with children and youth. As the educational expectations of the public do not seem to be realized in the performance of youth, the common view seems to be that the schools have failed rather than to examine the total educational system to identify malfunctioning.

Can The Schools Meet The New Demands?

As the non-school educational experiences of youth in some foreign countries have been reduced, other institutions have been created to take on some of the increasing educational tasks of our society. In the Communist countries, the organizations of children and youth supplement and complement the schools, For example, in Russia, children typically attend school from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. From 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. they participate in the activities of the Young Pioneers if they are under 14, and in the Communsol Youth Organization if they are 14 or older. These institutions furnish educational experiences in work, in social service, in group activity, in cross-age teaching, and the like. In America, too, the line between schooling and the educational responsibilities of other agencies may shift somewhat, but it is very likely that the public school will continue to have a major role. To continue its leadership, however, it must not become a rigid bureaucracy, clinging to the outmoded practices of the past, while it builds a dinosaur-like shell to protect itself from the pressures and opportunities of the present. This rigidity has not been true in the past, but some would argue that mass education in a country as large as ours stimulates and encourages organizations whose primary efforts are devoted to maintaining the status quo rather than seeking innovative solutions to new problems. In considering this question, it is useful to review our experience with Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, a statute which authorized federal aid to schools having high concentrations of children from low-income families.

more

In the first two years this program was in operation, it became apparent that most local schools had not analyzed the complex problems that are involved in improving the education of disadvantaged children. The plans of many schools in the first year or two were simplistic ones -- adding teachers or teacher aides to the school staff, or using more audio-visual materials. Gradually, however, a number of schools began to examine the learning problems of their children and to design programs that attacked these problems. By the end of the 1968-69 school year, sample studies indicated that approximately one-fourth of the programs were producing measurable positive results in reading and arithmetic, and by 1970-71 about one-third were reporting positive results.

An examination of the U. S. Office of Education reports, the state reports, and and the published reports of other investigations, all point to the same conclusions. There has been a steady increase in the number of Title I programs that are showing measurable improvements in the educational achievements of disadvantaged children, although there are still many programs that appear to be ineffective.

This brief review of the reaction of schools to the increasing demand that children from poverty be helped to learn what the schools try to teach indicates the ability of many of them to respond to the demand and to modify or transform their practices to accomplish the new taks. Several inferences can be drawn from the experience with Title I. The probability that a school will make a sustained effort to educate disadvantaged children is greater when parents, boards of education, or other citizens' groups press the school for action than when the impulse is wholly within the school staff. The probability of successful efforts is greater when the local school administration, particularly the school principal, encourages and assists the efforts. The probability of success is still greater when the efforts are guided by a comprehensive analysis of the problems in the local situation and the program is developed as a response to this analysis and not as a minor modification of the existing program. The probability of success is also greater when the members of the staff chiefly involved have been identified as volunteers wanting to work on the problems rather than persons selected or assigned without regard to their interests.

All of this suggests that many of the American public schools today can and will devote serious efforts to meeting new demands, and over a period of years will achieve some success with their efforts. However, the experience with Title I projects largely involved new programs within the school. Only a small number developed programs requiring extensive participation of out-of-school persons and organizations. Yet, in my earlier analysis of major educational problems of today, I included several -- character education, youth moving into adulthood, occupational education -- that are not likely to be solved without a great deal of participation and cooperation of out-of-school groups. Is there any basis for believing that schools and out-of-school groups can and will work together in effective efforts to solve these particular problems? For a partial answer to that question, let us look at some of the cooperative activities that are involved in what is called "action learning."

Action Learning Projects

A considerable number of high schools have already recognized the problems many of their students face in making the transition to adulthood and have responded by establishing a variety of programs which the National Association of Secondary School

more

Principals calls "Action Learning Projects." Action-Learning, as used by the Association, is "Learning from experience and associated study that is or could be accredited by an educational institution as part of a comprehensive learning program. It is learning from work that may be part-time or full-time for a period of several months or several years. Part-time action-learning programs will usually complement formal study in a school or college. Full-time assignments may involve guided study on the job. In either case, learning objectives may be specified in a formal agreement for learning. Action-learning may be in paid jobs or in non-paid volunteer work with private, public or community service agencies. Action-learning is work or volunteer service or personal performance -- as in art or drama -- in which participant learning is an objective. Action-learning has an element of novelty; it is not menial or repetitive."

In December 1972, a national conference, sponsored by the Association and held in Washington, D. C., brought together a variety of educators to work out the concept of action-learning in some practical detail. A number of already existent projects of action learning and voluntary service learning were reported at the conference. In the winter of 1974, a questionnaire sent by the Association to its 23,000 members brought in reports of more than 1,700 programs that the principals considered to involve action-learning. The Association organized a regional conference at the Wingspread Conference Center in April 1974, and at this meeting there were case reports on a number of action-learning projects in public and private schools, ranging from large city schools to a rural high school in a Minnesota town with a population of six hundred. The conference convinced the participants that the concept of action-learning is workable and deserves widespread development.

This general description of the increasing number of successful efforts of schools in working with other community agencies to increase the educational opportunities for adolescents is given concrete illustrations in New Roles for Youth in the School and the Community, a recent publication of the National Commission on Resources for Youth.

The longest experience many high schools have had with the development and use of out-of-school educational activities is the cooperative work study program developed as part of the vocational education program partly supported by federal funds. Typically, a student works on a job half a day and is in school half a day. A coordinator is employed by the school, not only to place students in appropriate work settings but also to help the employer develop a sequence of job assignments so that the student has a chance to continue learning rather than simply to perform routine operations. The coordinator is also expected to assist the teachers in the school to relate the curriculum as far as possible to the experiences the students are having in their work. A recent evaluation of cooperative high school work-study programs was conducted by Systems Development Corporation. The report furnished several kinds of evidence of the value of this program in preparing a young person for effective job performance, enabling him to obtain employment after graduation and furnish motivation for his school work. Although only a small proportion of high school students are enrolled in them, such programs demonstrate again that some high schools are able to develop for their students effective educational experiences that involve cooperation with out-of-school agencies.

more

During the past 20 years the community school idea, developed by Maurice Seay, Harold Sloan and others, during the 30's, has appealed to a wide circle of schools that are working to embody the concept into their operations. In essence, this idea conceives the school as an institution of service for the entire community, and the community as a major resource for the education of students. The embodiment of this concept in practice involves cooperation between the school and many community groups, organizations, and individuals; it also involves the utilization of out-of-school educational experiences. The establishment of the Community School Association with headquarters in Flint, Michigan, is an indication that a number of school systems are working to extend their services and resources beyond their own walls.

The fact that schools in all parts of the country and in communities of many types and sizes have been able to work constructively with out-of-school persons and organizations is, I believe, a basis for confidence that our schools can meet the new demands to develop significant out-of-school educational experiences that involve young people in responsible and constructive activities with adults.

Character Education

Probably the most difficult task public schools face is that of developing, in cooperation with parents and community groups, a comprehensive attack upon the critical problems of character development. It is the most difficult for several reasons.

First, it requires a new role for the school. In the past, the school was one of several major institutions that supported and reinforced the dominant ethical values of the community, but it did its part without conscious recognition that it was playing a significant role in the development of character. The unconscious contribution consisted largely in providing in the school the kind of environment that was afforded by the typical home from which the students came. For his well-known readers, McGuffey chose stories and essays that reflected the currently accepted values, but most teachers and administrators were not aware of any educational objectives other than the development of reading skills and the widening of the student's horizons as he comprehended the ideas presented in the stories and essays. Now it is necessary for the school to reexamine the contemporary conditions, to identify the kinds of contributions that it is capable of making, and to encourage and support the efforts of other community institutions that have a part to play.

Second, it is difficult for the school to deal with character education because the public school cannot be the chief contributor to such education and it cannot effectively dominate the coalition of community groups that must work out a feasible program of mutual responsibility. The school has had little practice in planning and implementing roles in which it is the junior partner.

Third, it is difficult because it requires the school to keep closely in touch with the out-of-school experiences of its students in order to focus on the real, ethical situations these children are confronting. Simulated and contrived situations are not alone sufficient for the student to comprehend the dilemmas that tempt and torture human beings, and they do not furnish the experience of suffering or enjoying the consequences of the courses of action the student chooses in response to these dilemmas.

more

But, even though character education poses some very difficult problems, there are contributions that the school can make. For example, the school can make a contribution in harmony with its traditional role of developing cognitive abilities and habits. They can do this by encouraging students to reflect upon the problem situations they are encountering, to analyze these situations, try to predict the consequences of several possible courses of action, compare their thinking with the actual things they did, and note the consequences they experienced.

Furthermore, the contributions envisaged by the curriculum constructors of the last century are also possible today. Literature, including stories, drama, novels, essays, and poetry, can illuminate ethical issues and help students to understand and feel the significance of courage in acting in accordance with conscience. Movies, TV, radio, and the press can also furnish material for this kind of study. The school can help the student evaluate critically the offerings of these media and develop criteria for selecting what he will spend time viewing, hearing, and reading. The school, working closely with other constructive community groups, can influence the content of these media and their distribution to children. These are both avenues for improving the ethical environment in which children develop.

The school can also continue its long accepted role of providing within its environment a more ideal democratic society than the adult community has yet been able to achieve. It can provide a setting in which young people can experience concretely the meaning of our democratic ideals. In the school, every student is to be respected as an important person, regardless of his background. In the school, the students can experience a society where justice and fair play dominate, a society where people care about each other and where all have an opportunity to share in planning activities, executing them, and gaining the rewards of what they have accomplished. It is not always easy for teachers and administrators to provide this kind of environment, but it is crucially important for children to see, firsthand, a society that encourages and supports ethical values.

Meeting the need for the school to participate constructively and energetically in doing its part to provide educational experiences necessary for character development will require more new thinking, new planning, and new practices than any of the other demands now faced. I cannot predict, as confidently as I have done for the others, that this demand will be met. It is possible that the roles required are so different from those of the past that the school will not be able to respond and that another agency for children and youth will be developed, as in the Communist countries. But the success our schools have had in the past in meeting new and difficult problems encourages me to believe that this one can also be solved.

Summary

The nation's schools face difficult problems that must be solved if they are to continue serving our society constructively and effectively. The two hundred years of our country's history demonstrate that in the past the schools have met new needs and have responded well to growing demands for education. As we examine in some detail several of the problems schools are now encountering we find bases for confidence regarding the future. The experience with Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1976 demonstrates that schools can, albeit slowly, devise new programs and new ways of working with disadvantaged children. A number of high schools have already worked out with various persons and agencies in their communities ways by which youth can work constructively with adults to render service, to obtain first-hand experience with the wider world, and to gain assurance that they are becoming responsible adults.

#####